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EARLY CROSS-CULTURAL POLITICAL ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE PATHS OF THE SILK ROAD: CYRUS THE GREAT AS A “KING OF THE CITY OF ANSHAN”*

by

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Abstract: In the famous inscription of the Cylinder of Cyrus the Great composed after the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, the founder of the Persian empire is referred to as “king of the city of Anshan” and is made to indicate that this title was equally borne by his ancestors, Cambyses, Cyrus and Teispes.

Reference to the venerable—but nonetheless Elamite and in all appearances no longer politically important at the time—city of Anshan in Cyrus’ royal family titulary has triggered much scholarly discussion. It is currently thought that the references to Cyrus’ dynastic association with Anshan might acknowledge some sense of an Elamite affinity on the part of Cyrus’ royal line.

The present study argues that the title “king of the city of Anshan” of Cyrus and his forebears was meant to accommodate traditional perceptions of “legitimate kingship” within a native Mesopotamian/Elamite environment and cannot be used as evidence for an Elamite affiliation of Cyrus’ dynastic line.

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The Anshanite dynastic title of Cyrus the Great and current interpretations

Since its discovery in the ruins of Babylon in 1879, the inscribed Cylinder of Cyrus the Great¹ has had a powerful impact on modern perceptions of the founder of the Persian empire. Composed following Cyrus' conquest of Babylon in 539 BC and stressing above all his care for the Babylonian people and his acts of social and religious restoration, the Akkadian text of the Cylinder occupies a central place in modern discussions of Cyrus' imperial policy.² This famous document is also at the heart of a lively scholarly controversy concerning the background of Cyrus' dynastic line.

The Persian monarch Darius I —who rose to the throne approximately a decade after the death of Cyrus the Great and who founded the ruling dynasty of the Achaemenids— placed great score on the Aryan (i.e., Iranian), Persian, and in particular Achaemenid pedigree of his family.³ He also referred to his seat of rule as Parsa — the ancient Persian form of the name of modern Fars in southwestern Iran, as well as the name of Darius' royal capital, Persepolis, situated in the same region.⁴

The Cylinder appears to draw a markedly different dynastic profile. In the lengthy, relatively well-preserved text, which is partly expressed in the first person singular, as an address by Cyrus himself, statements of Persian identity are absent. The background, moreover, of the founder of the Persian empire is defined (lines 12 and 21) in terms of a royal lineage going three generations back (Cyrus introduces himself as a son of Cambyses, grandson of Cyrus, and descendant⁵ of Teispes) which does not include Achaemenes, the eponymous ancestor of Darius' family; and in terms of Cyrus and his forebears' kingship over the "city⁶ of Anshan".

Lack of reference to Achaemenes in Cyrus' royal lineage in the Cylinder provides one of the main grounds for the now generally accepted distinctness of Cyrus' "Teispid" family and Darius' "Achaemenid" line.⁷ In the opinion of a

¹ For editions of the text, see Berger 1975 and Schaudig 2001: 550-56. The English translation followed here is by I. Finkel in http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/c/cyrus_cylinder_-_translation.aspx.

² See, among others, Kuhrt 1983 and 2007: 173-78 and *passim*, with relevant bibliography.

³ E.g., Kent 1953: 138 (DNa §2).

⁴ Kent 1953: 119 (DB I §1) and s.v. *Pārsa-* (2) on p. 196.

⁵ For the translation of I. Finkel followed here (i.e., "descendant", as opposed to "great-grandfather" which normally occurs in modern translations), see also de Miroschedji 1985: 281 n. 67 and 283 n. 76.

⁶ Cyrus' dynastic title in the Cylinder is often rendered in translation as "king of Anshan" (see, e.g., Pritchard 1969: 315-16 [trans. A. L. Oppenheim], Waters 2004: 94, Kuhrt 2007: 182) and is actually formulated in other Akkadian documents as "king of the land of Anshan" or simply "king of Anshan" (see below, n. 27). The determinative URU, however, which is consistently prefixed to Anshan in the text of the Cylinder (see, e.g., Schaudig 2001: 552-553, lines 12 and 21) indicates that, in this particular instance, the city itself of Anshan is meant.

⁷ See, among others, de Miroschedji 1985: 280-83; Young 1988: 27-28; Stronach 1997a,b,c; Rollinger 1999. But compare Vallat 1997 and 2011.

number of scholars, the claim advanced in the Cylinder, and echoed elsewhere in the Babylonian record, that Cyrus and his forebears were rulers of Anshan (instead of Parsa) might signal still more crucial differences between Cyrus' and Darius' families.

By the early 1970s various epigraphic and archaeological clues had begun to indicate that the lost city of Anshan could be identified with the important ancient urban center whose remains survive at Tall-i Malyan, in close proximity to Pasargadae and Persepolis.⁸ In accord with this identification, the city of Anshan, the ostensible city of rule of Cyrus and his forebears, can be seen to have been located in the heartland of the Persian empire, named Parsa by Darius. The Nabonidus Chronicle, wherein Cyrus' royal domain is identified once as "Anshan" and, a second time, as "[land of] Parsu",⁹ can further be taken to imply that the two toponyms served, at least near the middle of the sixth century BC, as viable, alternate designations for the same territory.¹⁰ While "Parsa", however, would have spontaneously evoked a Persian milieu, the fortunes of Anshan were inextricably linked from at least the second half of the third millennium onward with the world of the Elamites, one of the most important groups in Iran, who were culturally and linguistically distinct from the Persians. From just as early, and down to at least the mid-seventh century BC, titularies involving Anshan were also germane to the Elamite sphere.¹¹ Justifiable though it might be in geographical terms owing to Persian settlement in, and the ultimate takeover of, the region of the venerable Elamite city of Anshan, Cyrus' Anshanite dynastic title is bound to have resonated with Elamite associations.

To date a unanimously satisfactory explanation for the contrasting (self-)representations of Cyrus the Great, on the one hand, as a king of Anshan and Darius the Great, on the other hand, as a king of Persia has been impossible to procure. There is nonetheless a consensus that, in contrast to the unambiguous Persian pedigree of Darius' kingship, the pronounced Elamite associations of Cyrus' Anshanite title ought to somehow acknowledge, at the very least, an awareness of an Elamite historical context within which the line of Cyrus rose to prominence.

Taking into account the gradual decline of Elamite strength in the course of the seventh century,¹² when Cyrus' Teispid dynasty would have risen to power,¹³ one

⁸ Reiner 1973; Hansman 1972.

⁹ Grayson 1975: 106-7, col. ii 1 and 15, respectively.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., Hansman 1985a: 34; Stronach 1997c: 37-38; Waters 2004: 101 with n. 29. Compare the different conclusions of, e.g., Vallat 2011: 280 and Potts 2011.

¹¹ See conveniently the overviews of such titularies in the second millennium and the first half of the first millennium, respectively, in Potts 2005: 15 and de Miroschedji 1985: 278. The chronology of first-millennium Neo-Elamite rulers appears to remain rather fluid. If, as Waters (2000: 85-87, discussed in Henkelman 2003b: 262 and 2008: 56) suggested, Atta-hamiti-Inshushinak (the last Neo-Elamite ruler known to have used the title "king of Anshan and Susa") was none other than Atamaita, an Elamite adversary of Darius I mentioned in the Bisitun inscription (Kent 1953: 134 [DB V §71]), reference to Anshan in royal Elamite titles would have persisted down to the time of Darius' accession to the throne.

¹² Useful overviews of the ancient evidence and modern interpretations concerning political developments in the Elamite world (and the place of the Persians in it) during this period are offered, among others, by Miroschedji 1985 and 1990; Potts 1999 (259-353) and 2005; Henkelman 2003a: 182-87 and 2003b.

¹³ According to two different modern estimates, the Teispids would have risen to power in the course of the first (Weidner 1931-32: 5) or in the second (de Miroschedji 1985: 284-85) half of the

view posits a Persian ascendancy at that time over the long established Elamite domain of Anshan, in Fars, which could have occasioned the adoption of an Anshanite title. In the variant formulations of this hypothesis, such an adoption would be, for instance, symbolic of an “héritage élamite assumé par les premiers souverains perses”¹⁴ and possibly allude to a Persian kingdom of Anshan that was “Elamito-Persian during this first stage of its existence”,¹⁵ or would be specifically aimed to “[supply] legitimacy to a Persian dynasty that had been victorious over indigenous Elamites”,¹⁶ or would, perhaps, reflect a “political rivalry with the Neo-Elamite kings”,¹⁷ who styled themselves “kings of Anshan and Susa”.

The notoriously thin trail of historical evidence about the same period¹⁸ — joined especially with the possibility of the Elamite origins of Cyrus’ name¹⁹ — has been seen by others as an indication that the first ruling dynasty (and hence, the origins) of the Persian empire might not have been as strictly Persian as would otherwise have been expected. Notably, as Daniel Potts has argued in a number of studies since 1999, Cyrus’ family could have been rulers of a kingdom that was “predominantly ethnically Elamite” and distinct from a “predominantly ethnically Persian” entity of Parsa (ruled over by Darius’ family),²⁰ and could have possessed “a far more Elamite cast than Darius’ ”.²¹ As a corollary to these contentions, “what we today call the *Persian* empire [could have been], in fact, originally an *Anshanite* empire”.²²

Modern inclinations to explain the purported Anshanite dynastic identity of Cyrus the Great “within the frame of Elamite history”²³ would appear to be entirely justified. Given the millennial history of the city and region of Anshan as a part of the Elamite world taken over by the Persians, the toponym’s prestigious place in Elamite royal protocols, and not least the close co-existence and fusion of Elamite and Persian elements in Fars,²⁴ it is highly unlikely that the Cylinder’s references to Cyrus and his forebears as “kings of the city of Anshan” merely possessed a neutral

seventh century BC. Concerning the viability of the former estimate (which was discredited by de Miroschedji), see Shahbazi 1993 and Waters 1999: 105.

¹⁴ de Miroschedji 1985: 299; cf., among others, Briant 1996: 28, Stronach 1997c: 38, Kuhrt 2007: 178.

¹⁵ Expression owed to de Miroschedji 1985: 304.

¹⁶ Waters 2004: 95. See, however, the objection of Henkelman (2008: 56-57 n. 136) that “[t]here is not a shred of evidence for a military and/or political clash between pre-Achaemenid ‘Persians’ and Elamites”.

¹⁷ Henkelman 2008: 56; cf. idem 2003a: 193-94,

¹⁸ For the relevant textual and archaeological testimony, see the works cited above, n. 12. The general paucity of hard evidence concerning the history of the Persians before Cyrus also emerges clearly from the treatments of Young 1988: 27-28 and Briant 1996: 23-38 and 905-909.

¹⁹ For this possibility, first suggested by Andreas (1904: 93-94) in 1902 and now widely favored, see Stronach 1997c: 38 (based on Zadok 1991: 237 and 1995: 246); Henkelman 2003a: 194-96 and 2008: 55-57; Potts 2005: 21-22 (with references to the uncertainties surrounding the linguistic origins of the names of Cyrus’ forebears in general); Tavernier 2011: 211-12 s.v. *Kuraš*.

²⁰ Potts 2005: 19.

²¹ Potts 2005: 22.

²² Potts 2005: 23, cf. 17, 20-22 and idem 1999: 306-7.

²³ Cf. de Miroschedji 1985: 297.

²⁴ de Miroschedji (1985: 296, 299-306) first put forward a cogent hypothesis of a Persian “ethnogenesis” based on the fusion of Elamite and Iranian elements. For phenomena of Elamite-Iranian acculturation, see further Henkelman 2003a: esp. 187-96, with references.

geographical significance.²⁵ On the other hand, however, it is at least a fact that the divergent speculations about the Elamite affinities of Cyrus' patrilinear line have developed in a vacuum of reliable evidence.

Stated categorically in the Cylinder, and currently accepted as a marker of a less-than-fully-Persian ideological and/or ethno-cultural identity, the entitlement of Cyrus and his forebears as "kings of the city of Anshan" is arguably much more likely to have accommodated ideological and political sensitivities of Cyrus' non-Persian subjects than expressed native realities pertaining to the Teispid line.

The elusive royal Anshanite background of Cyrus the Great

Currently thought to offer insights into universally acknowledged facts about Cyrus' family history and dynastic identity,²⁶ the tradition of the Teispid family's royal association with Anshan recorded in the Cylinder is nonetheless exclusively attested so far in Babylonian documents, all of which date, moreover, from the time of Cyrus or later.²⁷ Outside this Babylonian saga, there is no incontrovertible evidence to suggest that any of Cyrus' Teispid ancestors viewed themselves as Anshanite monarchs or that any of them ruled from the city of Anshan.

In the opinion of several scholars the possibility that Cyrus and his immediate forebears were rulers of Anshan materializes in the contents of an Elamite legend of a seal, now preserved by impressions on a handful of tablets from the Persepolis Fortification archive²⁸ and supposedly belonging originally to Cyrus the Great's

²⁵ Cf. Henkelman 2008: 56. This approach would also rule out (see also de Miroschedji 1985: 296-98, Stronach 1997c: 37-38 and 2000: 684) a view, which was especially favored in the course of the 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s, that references to Anshan in the dynastic title of Cyrus attested in Babylonian sources were merely meant to make Cyrus' Persian homeland more readily recognizable by a Mesopotamian audience (Harmatta 1974: 34); or that they merely manifest a tenacity of the Late Babylonian scribal and learned circles to traditional terminology going back to the third millennium (Eilers 1974: 27), when Anshan is first attested in the Mesopotamian record.

²⁶ See, e.g., Stronach 1978: 284; de Miroschedji 1985: 298; Stronach 1997c: 38; Potts 2005: 14; Henkelman 2008: 55.

²⁷ The relevant references are clearly set out in Waters 2004: 93-94. As we can glean from his presentation, in addition to the Cylinder of Cyrus, the Teispids' royal Anshanite connections are attested in two further official contexts: namely, a brick inscription from Ur (Schaudig 2001: 549, lines 1 and 3) and the Sippar Cylinder of Nabonidus (Schaudig 2001: 417, line 108), the last Babylonian ruler displaced by Cyrus. The brick inscription, referring to Anshan (in this case, "a land/country" [KUR]) as the domain of rule of Cyrus the Great and his father, Cambyses, evidently postdates Cyrus' accession to the Babylonian throne. The Sippar Cylinder, which is dated between the thirteenth and sixteenth regnal years of Nabonidus' (543/542 BC-540/539 BC) (Schaudig 2001: 415), refers to Cyrus as a "king of the land/country (KUR) Anshan" in a context which is dated to the beginning of Nabonidus' third year (summer 553 BC) and suggests that an Anshanite title was already used by Cyrus before his campaign and triumph against the Median king Astyages. One last reference to Cyrus as a "king of Anshan" occurs in the Chronicle of Nabonidus (Grayson 1975: 106, col. ii 1), in a context dated to 550 or 549 BC, thus putatively a decade before Cyrus' conquest of Babylon, though also during his reign. For the probable "editing" of this text, however, by the "entourage of Cyrus" following the Persian conquest of Babylon, see Zawadzki 2010.

²⁸ The seal (PFS 93*) is attested on Persepolis Fortification Tablets 692-695, dated to years 19, 21 and 22 of Darius I, and 2033, dated to year 20[+x] of the same monarch (Hallock 1969). See also Garrison 1991: 3-7; Garrison and Root 1996: 6-7 and fig. 2a-c, and the recent, wide-ranging study of this artifact by Garrison (2011). Concerning variant readings of line 3 (bearing on the significance of the reference to Anshan) of the seal legend, see also Garrison 1991: 4; Henkelman 2003a: 193 n. 39 and 2008: 55; Waters 2011: 290.

grandfather.²⁹ There is no direct evidence concerning the provenance of the seal. The inscription, reading “Kurash [i.e., Cyrus] the Anshanite, son of Teispes”, admittedly presents us with a suggestive analogy for the names of Cyrus’ grandfather and “ancestor” (or “great-grandfather”) recorded in the Cyrus Cylinder, as well as for these individuals’ purported association with Anshan. Although the seal is featured on tablets dated from the 19th regnal year of Darius I (or 503 BC) onward, and its date of production is debated to this day,³⁰ M. Garrison’s recent thesis, that the seal belongs stylistically, compositionally, and thematically to an Anshanite glyptic environment that emerged in Fars at a late Assyrian date (second half of the seventh century),³¹ would appear to further support the possibility that this artifact was produced during the time, and was a possession, of Cyrus’ grandfather. The bearing of this document on Cyrus’ family history remains difficult to assess, however. Neither the Kurash of the seal nor his father, Teispes, are identified as royal individuals.³² Thus, if the seal actually belonged to Cyrus’ grandfather, its legend falls short of corroborating the royal Anshanite status, let alone the actual royal title, of the homonymous ancestors of Cyrus mentioned in the Cylinder and could induce suspicion that “Cyrus the Great...exaggerated his royal lineage”³³ in the latter document. Or, since neither the name “Cyrus” nor the name “Teispes” can be presumed to have been uncommon,³⁴ the question of the intrinsic connection of this seal to Cyrus’ earlier family history could remain open.³⁵

The reliability of the sum of the extant references to the “traditional” dynastic identification of the Teispids with Anshan can also be put to doubt. A much-discussed passage in the annals of Ashurbanipal mentions a certain “Kurash (i.e., Cyrus), king of the land of Parsumash”, who, following Ashurbanipal’s victory over the Elamites (c. 646 BC), sent his tribute and surrendered his son, Arukku, to the Assyrian monarch.³⁶ Nothing more is reported about this Kurash, and our Assyrian sources create ambiguity about the exact location of his royal domain (which is merely described as being, from the Assyrians’ northern Mesopotamian perspective, on the “far side of Elam”³⁷), as they do in general with toponyms of

²⁹ For a representative sample of scholarly discussions concerning the attribution of the seal, see conveniently the references cited in Potts 2005: 18-19 and Garrison 2011: 378 n. 4.

³⁰ According to different earlier assessments of the style of carving and iconography of the seal, this artifact could have been produced, for instance, in the late seventh century or no earlier than 600 (de Miroschedji 1985: 286-87; cf., e.g., Potts 1999: 306 and 2005: 20, and Stronach 2003: 138 with n. 4) or shortly before its use on the Persepolitan tablets (Young 1988: 27). Thus, it might date from some moment during the lifetime of Cyrus’ grandfather to as much as three or four generations later. An overview of the different earlier opinions concerning the dating and attribution of the seal is offered in Potts 2005: 19-20. Most recently, Quintana (2011: 175-77 and 188 [English summary]) opts for a date during the reign of Darius I, while Garrison (2011: 400) sees the seal as representative “of a glyptic art whose origins are to be found ... in the (re)emerging political state of Anšan/Fārs under the Teispids in the second half of the 7th century B.C.”.

³¹ Garrison 2011.

³² This circumstance is widely noted but the uncertainty is thought to be counterbalanced by the attested uses of the seal in transactions made in the name of the king (de Miroschedji 1985: 285-86), in “an explicit elite context” (Henkelman 2008: 56 n. 135; cf. Garrison 2011: e.g., 383, 400).

³³ Waters 2011: 292.

³⁴ For the name “Cyrus/ *Kuraš*”, see Zadok 1976: 63; Tavernier 2011: 211-12, s.v. *Kuraš*.

³⁵ Cf. Young 1988: 27.

³⁶ Borger 1996: 191-92 and 250; Weidner 1931-32: 4-5.

³⁷ After Waters 1999: 105.

apparent relevance to the Persians.³⁸ The date of the event (set, at the latest, to some three years after 646) does not preclude, however, a correlation with the reign of Cyrus the Great's grandfather.³⁹ In the opinion of a number of scholars, the Assyrian evidence does not preclude, either, that the Parsumash of Ashurbanipal's annals was, or was located in, Fars.⁴⁰ If Parsumash was indeed a reference to Fars, and the mid-seventh-century Kurash of Parsumash was none other than the grandfather of Cyrus the Great,⁴¹ this would mean that at least one of the early Teispids was recognized during his lifetime, notably in a Mesopotamian context, as a Persian, rather than an Anshanite, ruler. This incongruity with the testimony of the Cylinder has been explained away on the grounds that "different labels from different sources cannot be reduced to a single standard of comparison".⁴² In the lack of incontrovertible evidence, however, about the status and titulary of Cyrus' grandfather, one ought to at least allow for the obvious alternative: namely, that the Cylinder might be attributing to the grandfather of Cyrus the Great a royal protocol that was alien to his own titulary — and the same could be true in the cases of Cyrus' two other forebears, Teispes and Cambyses, who are also depicted in the same text as "kings of the city of Anshan", but whose actual titularies are not otherwise attested.

Doubts about the accuracy of the claims advanced in the Cylinder also arise from the archaeological domain. Intriguingly, while the Cylinder affirms the rule of Cyrus and his forebears over the city of Anshan itself (as the predeterminative URU ["city"] of Anshan in the Cylinder indicates), so far at least, the archaeological picture of the site at Tall-i Malyan during the seventh and the first half of the sixth century —when Cyrus' forebears were ostensibly in power— is one of a city that was completely deserted.⁴³ The very idea, furthermore, that the early Teispids could have been rulers of *any* urban center in Fars is rendered doubtful by current archaeological surveys, which suggest that habitation in the

³⁸ For presentations of the relevant textual evidence (and contrasting conclusions), see, e.g., de Miroschedji 1985: 271-78 and Waters 1999.

³⁹ See above, n. 13.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., Waters 1999: 104-105 and 2011: 286. For a contrary view, see de Miroschedji 1985: 271-78.

⁴¹ For the ongoing debate concerning these identifications, see de Miroschedji 1985: 268-85; Potts 1999: 287-88 and 2005: 18; Rollinger 1999; Henkelman 2003a: 184 n. 9 and 196 n. 49, all with further references.

⁴² Waters 2011: 292.

⁴³ Indeed, the general absence of vestiges corresponding to the period of Teispid rule at Tall-i Malyan led Sumner (1986: 11; echoed by Abdi 2005) to comment that though "[s]ome early kings of the Achaemenid (*sic!*) dynasty were styled 'Kings of Anshan'...it is not clear that the name refers to a city or settlement rather than the land over which the kings ruled" (cf. de Miroschedji 1985: 299). To date the archaeological picture at Malyan in the first half of the first millennium has not altered in any significant way (see, e.g., Carter 1994: 66; Abdi 2005; Boucharlat 2005: 230-31). Given the ambiguity of the Elamite determinative AŠ (which could refer to either a city or a region), the suggestion (Potts 2011: 41) that references to a *city*, rather than the region, of Anshan can be recognized in Persepolitan tablets is difficult to accept at face value (cf. the note of caution in Henkelman 2008: 348 [who also inclines, however, to suppose that, in these particular contexts the references are to a city] and the reservations of Waters [2011: 288, based on Steve 1988]). Such textual references to Anshan (Hallock 1969: 668) and rare archaeological finds from the area of Tall-i Malyan dated to the Achaemenid period (Abdi 2001 and 2005; Boucharlat 2005: 231), do not easily lend themselves to a hypothesis of a continuing existence of the city of Anshan through the seventh and the first half of the sixth century and of Cyrus the Great and his forebears' rule over it.

region largely lapsed into a nomadic or semi-nomadic mode from about 1000 BC until the time that Cyrus initiated construction at Pasargadae.⁴⁴ As Daniel Potts cautiously points out, one day the progress of archaeological explorations may produce traces connected with the purported rule of the Teispids over Anshan in hitherto unexcavated parts of the mound of Tall-i Malyan or elsewhere in Fars.⁴⁵ The cumulative impression one forms, however, from the extant morass of uncertain evidence is that the reality of the claim of an age-old royal Anshanite affiliation of the Teispid dynasty remains difficult to confirm.⁴⁶

The family background of Cyrus the Great was subject to widely divergent interpretations in antiquity.⁴⁷ For instance, in the fifth-century writings of Herodotus (1.107), the founder of the Persian empire is represented as the son of the princess Mandane, daughter of the last native king of the Medes, Astyages, and a certain Cambyses who, far from being identified as a king of Anshan, is referred to as a Persian of “good family...whom [Astyages] looked on as much inferior to a Mede of even middle condition”.⁴⁸ According to Ctesias,⁴⁹ Cyrus was the son of a poor Mardian couple. In yet another version of Cyrus’ ancestry, attested by brief inscriptions at Pasargadae and also echoed in the Bisitun inscription⁵⁰ and Herodotus (7.11), Cyrus was, like Darius I, a member of the Achaemenid family.⁵¹

Current speculations on the ideological and/or ethno-cultural Elamite affinities of Cyrus’ line are based on a presumption that the testimony of the Cylinder — which, after all, bears an official stamp of Cyrus’ approval— stands apart from these other versions, which are largely perceived as popular re-workings of Cyrus’ family history among the empire’s subjects informed by different nationalist agendas;⁵² or, in the cases of the laconic Pasargadae inscriptions stating Cyrus’ Achaemenid origins, as a part of an elaborate propaganda of legitimation undertaken by Darius I upon his enthronement.⁵³

“Official” is not always the same as “historically accurate”. In as much as concrete references to the royal connection of Cyrus’ family with the city of Anshan only emerge in Cyrus’ time and in Babylonian sources, it would seem legitimate to explore the significance of this connection with closer reference to the

⁴⁴ See de Miroschedji 1985: 291-95; Sumner 1986; de Miroschedji 1990: 52-65; Carter 1994: 65-67; Boucharlat 2005: 225-32. Cf. the similar tenor of Hdt. 1.125, with the comments of Briant 1984: 75-76 and 105-108.

⁴⁵ Potts 2005: 21. In the case of Malyan, however, cf. Sumner’s (1986: 11) remark that “[m]uch of the western half of the site...covered by a Sasanian-Islamic deposit...could conceal a large Achaemenid settlement. However, no Achaemenid sherds were found in any of the surface sampling units.”

⁴⁶ The uncertainties which surround the affiliation of Cyrus’ family with Anshan cannot be remedied by means of appeals to the probable Elamite origin of the name “Cyrus” (and conceivably of the names “Cambyses” and “Teispes”), the implications of which are at least as uncertain (see, in particular, the observations of Henkelman 2008: 55-57), and to an, at least so far, strictly hypothetical dichotomy between an Anshanite/Elamite and a Persian political authority in Fars which were associated, respectively, with Cyrus’ and Darius’ families.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Briant 1996: 25-26 and 905 (II).

⁴⁸ Trans. Rawlinson 1942.

⁴⁹ Jacoby 1961: 90 [Nikolaos von Damaskos] F66.2-4.

⁵⁰ Kent 1953: 119 (DB I §10).

⁵¹ Kent 1953: 116 (CMa, CMb, CMc).

⁵² For instance, for an interpretation of Herodotus’ account of Cyrus’ origins as a piece of Median propaganda, see, among others, Briant 1984: 75.

⁵³ See, among other discussions by this scholar, Stronach 1997b: 326 and 1997c: 39.

events of Cyrus' reign and the aims of his policy in the Babylonian domain. The relevance of such an alternative frame of reference is suggested, among others, by a famous Achaemenid artifact which clearly demonstrates that the official image of Persian royalty was just as adaptable, as popular accounts of the *vitae* and *gestae* of Persian kings, to the different political and cultural perceptions and expectations current among the empire's subjects.

Darius as a king of Egypt

The magnificent, more-than-life-size statue of Darius the Great, now conserved in the Tehran Archaeological Museum, was excavated at Susa in 1972.⁵⁴ Inscriptions on the body of the statue and on the plinth indicate that it was commissioned in Egypt; it likely stood initially in a temple in Heliopolis, the sacred city of the Egyptian god Atum mentioned in the texts of the statue.⁵⁵

The head and part of the upper body are missing, but the remainder of the statue depicts Darius as a stereotypical Persian monarch.⁵⁶ In common with representations of Persian royalty on Achaemenid reliefs, coins and seals, the king is shown in the pleated ceremonial Persian robe with wide sleeves and possesses a short, pointed sword placed in a scabbard with scalloped edge.

In the trilingual cuneiform text carved down the pleats on the right side of the robe,⁵⁷ the invocations of Darius' Iranian patron deity,⁵⁸ Ahuramazda, the proud proclamation that "the Persian man has conquered Egypt",⁵⁹ and Darius' dynastic credentials as "a great king, king of kings, king of countries, king in this great earth, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian",⁶⁰ all echo faithfully the tenor of known inscriptions of Darius in the Persian homeland. The work as a whole, however, displays a mixture of Persian and Egyptian elements.

Recorded in cuneiform on the pleats of the robe, the name of Darius is also rendered twice, for instance, on the tassels of the belt in Pharaonic fashion: in the form of a cartouche with hieroglyphic signs.⁶¹ At the same time, in the hieroglyphic inscriptions and the figured decoration of the base of the statue, Darius' status is adjusted to native Egyptian formulations of royal authority.

On the front and back sides of the plinth, the identical representations of two fecundity figures, binding together a lotus and a papyrus —the plants symbolizing Upper and Lower Egypt— reiterate a traditional Egyptian motif of royal power which conveyed the notion of the unification of Egypt under one rule.⁶² Here this

⁵⁴ See Kervran et al. 1972 and the articles dealing with the excavation, iconography and inscriptions of the statue in the fourth issue of the *Cahiers de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Iran*, published in 1974.

⁵⁵ Yoyotte 1974: 182, lines 1-2 of the hieroglyphic text ("texte 2") carved vertically on the pleats of the robe of Darius.

⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of the iconography of the statue, see Stronach 1974 and figs. 20-21.

⁵⁷ Vallat 1974.

⁵⁸ Vallat 1974: 162-163, lines 1 and 4 of the Old Persian version and lines 1 and 3 of the Elamite and Akkadian versions.

⁵⁹ The notion of conquest emerges more clearly in the Elamite version (Vallat 1974: 163). Observation owed to David Stronach (personal communication). Cf. Kent 1953: 138 (DNa §4).

⁶⁰ Vallat 1974: e.g., 162, lines 3 and 4 of the Old Persian version. Cf., e.g., Kent 1953: 138 (DNa §2).

⁶¹ Yoyotte 1974: 181 with fig. 24a and pl. XXV.2.

⁶² For a discussion of this motif, see Roaf 1974: 74 with fig. 22 and pl. XXX.

ancient Egyptian notion is referred to Darius, to whom, as it is stated in the twin texts carved on either side of the motif, “Upper and Lower Egypt were given”.⁶³ A further reference in these texts to “all the lands of the plains and the mountains reunited under [Darius’] sandals”⁶⁴ —an obvious allusion to Darius’ status as a ruler of a world empire— finds a matching expression in the Egyptian-style figures carved on the long sides of the plinth, all representing subject peoples the Persian empire.⁶⁵

Remarkably, there are no references in the hieroglyphic texts to Darius’ Persian identity, let alone to a Persian domination of Egypt; and even Darius’ elsewhere consistent association with the chief Iranian deity, Ahuramazda, is here replaced by references to his divine affiliation with Atum and Re, divine patrons *par excellence* of Egyptian kings.

Although it may be incongruous with representations of Persian royalty in a homeland Iranian setting, the incorporation of traditional Egyptian motifs in the statue of Darius was not a unique phenomenon. It is also attested in other known monuments of the same ruler, which, like the statue, were executed in Egypt and were addressed to the Egyptian people.⁶⁶ The sum of these monuments bears testimony to a substantial dialogue between the Persian and Egyptian worldviews.⁶⁷ They eloquently express Darius’ familiarity with and respect for native Egyptian ideology and Egyptian political sensitivities. Simultaneously, they allude to an all-time imperative to legitimize Persian imperial authority among the empire’s subjects by making (strategic) allowances for different local norms of legitimate rule and different native notions of royal behavior.

There is arguably good reason for proposing that the representation of Cyrus the Great and his forebears in the Cylinder as kings of the “city of Anshan” was meant to address analogous delicate ideological requirements, this time, in a Mesopotamian context.

The inscription of the Cylinder of Cyrus as a text of legitimation

As a number of earlier commentators have pointed out, the utterances of the Cyrus Cylinder reverberate with the notion of Cyrus’ legitimate right to rule and are cast in accordance with traditional Mesopotamian expressions of legitimate kingship.⁶⁸

Royal descent and divine sanction were universal qualifications for legitimate kingship. These qualifications are articulated in the Cylinder by the proem’s reference (lines 11-12) to Cyrus as a ruler chosen by Marduk (the chief god of the Neo-Babylonian pantheon) and by overlapping assertions, made later on in the text,

⁶³ Yoyotte 1974: 183, “texte 4”, line 3.

⁶⁴ Yoyotte 1974: 183, “texte 4”, line 2.

⁶⁵ A detailed analysis is offered by Roaf 1974, with fig. 23 and pls. XXXI-XXXVI.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, the *stelai* erected along Darius’ canal connecting the Nile with the Red Sea, Posener 1936: 51, 66, 180-81 and pls. IV and V, and the commentary of Roaf 1974: 79-84. For further examples and commentary, see Briant 1996: 490-500 and 973-75.

⁶⁷ Concerning the dialogue in general between the ideology, arts, and practices of the Persians, on the one hand, and their various subjects, on the other hand, see, among others, Root 1979 and Briant 1987.

⁶⁸ See, in particular, Kuhrt 1983 (stressing, like Harmatta [1974] before her, the particularly close stylistic parallels of the Cylinder text with the Babylonian inscriptions of the Assyrian monarch Ashurbanipal) and 2007: 173-76.

that Cyrus was at once the son, grandson, and “descendant” of kings, as well as “the eternal seed of royalty” (lines 20-22).

Reference to Marduk (rather than to Cyrus’ own Iranian god[s]) as the divinity that made Cyrus a world ruler (lines 11-12) is a telling indication of the particular Babylonian perspective from which Cyrus’ legitimacy is interpreted in this context. It is a perspective that surfaces unerringly throughout the text.

Articulated as programmatic announcements of the new lord of Babylon —and certainly consistent with the spirit of Persian imperial proclamations— statements of respect and restoration (e.g., lines 22, 25-26, 30-32)⁶⁹ were also germane to traditional Mesopotamian formulations of legitimate kingship from the third millennium onward.

The elaborate royal titulature, with which Cyrus was endowed upon his accession to the throne of Babylon, was also meant to confer upon Cyrus’ authority the widest possible gamut of historical Mesopotamian protocols of sovereignty. Proclaimed “king of the universe, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world” (line 20), Cyrus, a newcomer to Mesopotamia, was effectively assuming legitimate succession to all major regimes that had arisen in the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates in the course of the preceding millennia.

Although it points specifically to western Iranian and, in particular, Elamite — rather than Mesopotamian— dynastic realities, the identification of Cyrus as a king of “the city of Anshan” was perhaps the most crucial touch to the elaborate representation of Cyrus as a “normative” Mesopotamian ruler. It arguably supplied a basis for accommodating a further important requirement for legitimate kingship over Mesopotamia. This requirement can be traced as far back as the late third millennium BC.

The testimony of the Sumerian King List and Herodotus

The Sumerian King List,⁷⁰ probably composed around 2100 BC, but known from later copies from Mesopotamia and Susa, offers a description of the origins and early history of kingship in Mesopotamia.

The text comprises two main sections, which purport to document, respectively, the chronological order in which different cities and rulers held power in Mesopotamia before and after the Flood, giving specific numbers of years for the regnal period(s) of each city and (usually) each individual king. There is a repetitive pattern. In the beginning of each section it is stated that “kingship descended from heaven” to a particular city (at first, at Eridu; then, after the Flood, at Kish). The transfer of power from one city to another is expressed by fixed formulae: “city X fell and the kingship was taken to city Y”, in the section relating events before the Flood; or “city X was defeated and the kingship was taken to city Y”, for the period after the Flood. A summary, concluding each section, gives the total number of cities and kings that ruled before and after the Flood, and the overall time span during which kingship was exercised. Thus, “in 5 cities 8 kings ... ruled for 241200 years” before the Flood (lines 36-39); and there were 11 cities

⁶⁹ Cf. Kent 1953: 120 (DB I §14).

⁷⁰ Jacobsen 1939 is the classic treatment of the List. Here references are to The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, in <http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr211.htm>.

“in which the kingship was exercised”, and a total of 134 (or 139) kings, who ruled (according to the more extensively preserved text) for over 28876 (or 3443?) years after the Flood (lines 426-30).

There is little to commend the overall commitment of the List to historical accuracy.⁷¹ The statement that “kingship descended from heaven” is difficult to interpret as an objective description of the circumstances that led to the emergence of sovereign rule. Quoted in figures of over 18000 and up to 43200 years (lines 1-35), individual reign lengths before the Flood are obviously entirely fictitious; and the same holds true of subsequent, lesser reign lengths (of, e.g., over 100 and up to 1200 years, lines 43-129) down to the third millennium (i.e., the first rule of Unug [Uruk]). The personalities and activities of some of the rulers mentioned are the stuff of legend (e.g., lines 112-114: “Gilgamesh, whose father was a phantom (?), the lord of Kulaba”). The idea of the transmission of rule over the span of millennia in a single sequence of cities, which held power in (linear) succession to one another, also appears to follow a convention that did not acknowledge the existence of rival political authorities. In a sense, there may not have even existed a “standard” version acceptable to all cities in all periods. Variations, observed among the different “copies” with respect to the arrangement of the entries and the details of the summaries, might speak for the simultaneous currency of different interpretations of the history of kingship in Mesopotamia that were meant to privilege the respective cities in which the various “copies” were composed and/or the dynastic interests of different kings. Despite its partially dubious standing, however, as a document about early Mesopotamian political history, the Sumerian King List offers valuable perspectives on timeless principles of the Mesopotamian royal tradition.

Set to around 2100 BC, the initial composition of the text would belong to a time when the several, initially autonomous Mesopotamian cities had already experienced unification under one rule. It has long been suggested, therefore, that the primary purpose of the account was to “demonstrate that [Sumer] had always been united under one king — though these kings were ruling successively in different capitals”.⁷²

The contents of this famous account, however, also lead to important inferences about fundamental notions of ancient Mesopotamian kingship: namely, that in the Mesopotamian worldview there was only ever a single, divinely sanctioned (and, hence, legitimate) line of kingship; and the right to rule was, above all, the prerogative of cities.

Down to the first half of the first millennium, Mesopotamian documents testify to the rise to power locally of different ethnic/linguistic groups. The boundaries of Mesopotamian political control also fluctuated with time, encompassing at the height of the Neo-Assyrian empire a very substantial part of the Near East. The notion, however, that the (same!) kingship —which had descended from heaven— was transferred from city to city was perpetuated, projecting an impression that the

⁷¹ Among earlier commentaries concerning the “tendentious” character of this composition, see Michalowski 1983, with references.

⁷² Pritchard 1969: 265. For the history of this interpretation, see Michalowski 1983: 240, who further argues (p. 242) that the emergence of “[t]he fiction that each city in Mesopotamia in turn held the bala, the turn of office” was due, to begin with, to the inability of the rulers of Isin to base their claims to legitimate rule on a proper genealogical charter.

succession of different states, and even different ethnic groups, to power in Mesopotamia was largely a matter of a geographical relocation of the seat of rule.

This Mesopotamian interpretation of the “right to rule” arguably survived down to the time of Cyrus and is echoed, outside the Mesopotamian sphere, by a passage in the work of the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus. In *Histories* Book 1, prefacing a brief account of the history of Babylon and a narrative of Cyrus’ capture of this city, Herodotus indicates that, in the time of Cyrus, Babylon was “the most famous and the strongest of the numerous, great *polismata* of Assyria”, as well as the city (*polis*) where “the royal dwelling (or “the kingship”⁷³) was established after Nineveh was laid waste”.⁷⁴

By the term “Assyria” Herodotus is obviously designating in this instance, not just the territory of the Assyrian heartland around the city of Ashur in northern Mesopotamia, but the wider Mesopotamian region — the quintessential land of “numerous, great cities”, including Babylon. The city of Nineveh, whose fall is mentioned in the text, was the very last major capital of the Neo-Assyrian state. Its destruction was brought about by a joint Babylonian and Median assault in 612 BC and had spelt the final demise of Assyrian power. On the other hand, in the time of Cyrus to which the passage refers (some seven decades after the fall of Nineveh), Babylon was the center of power of the extended Neo-Babylonian kingdom — an entity that had a patently non-Assyrian political identity and had emerged following the collapse of Assyria. Strictly speaking, Herodotus’ designation of Mesopotamia by the term “Assyria” is anachronistic.⁷⁵ The passage, referring to Babylon, in Cyrus’ time, as a city of “Assyria” and as the successor capital (in “Assyria”) to Nineveh, would also appear to be confounding two distinct historical eras and two distinct kingdoms.

The description, however, of Babylon (the political center of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom) as the successor to Nineveh (which was the last capital of the preceding Assyrian empire) can be easily explained on the basis of the fundamental notion, repeatedly evoked in the Sumerian King List, of a single legitimate kingship that passed from one Mesopotamian city to another — a political continuum to which a further allusion might be recognized in the Herodotean reference to the “numerous great cities” that existed in “Assyria”, of which Babylon was the “the most famous and the strongest” in Cyrus’ time.

⁷³ For this sense, see Powell 1960: s.v. βασιλῆιος: βασιλῆια, τὰ (2).

⁷⁴ Hdt. 1.178.1: τῆς δὲ Ἀσσυρίης ἐστὶ μὲν κού καὶ ἄλλα πολίσματα μεγάλα πολλά, τὸ δὲ ὀνομαστότατον καὶ ἰσχυρότατον καὶ ἔνθα σφί Νίνου ἀναστάτου γενομένης τὰ βασιλῆια κατεστήκεε, ἦν Βαβυλῶν.

⁷⁵ This is not the place to elaborate on the complex historiographic background of Herodotus’ anachronistic reference to Mesopotamia —which, properly speaking, was Babylonian territory at the time— by the name of the long obsolete Assyrian state. Considering the phenomenal expansion of the Assyrian empire and its lasting impact on the Near Eastern world, it is possible, for instance, that Herodotus’ references to Babylon and Mesopotamia as an Assyrian domain reflect actual Neo-Babylonian claims of legitimate inheritance of the former Assyrian realm (and perhaps also echo intense, centennial processes of homogenization (“Assyrianization”) [Parpola 2004] in the territories under Assyrian rule?). Or, Herodotus’ characterization of the Babylonians as Assyrians could derive from an Iranian interpretation of the succession of kingdoms in Asia, which, like the Sumerian King List, did not acknowledge parallel rules, and which co-opted the Neo-Babylonian kingdom into the Assyrian regime “taken over” by the Medes. For a more detailed presentation of these suggestions, see Zournatzi, in press.

The spirit of the Sumerian King List was very much alive when Cyrus conquered Babylon, and when the text of his Babylonian Cylinder was composed.⁷⁶ Even without direct evidence to this effect, it is most unlikely that the timeless precepts of the List on the nature of Mesopotamian kingship would have been overridden in the context of representations of Cyrus as a legitimate king of Mesopotamia addressed to a Mesopotamian audience. This brings us back to the perplexing characterization of Cyrus and his forebears as “kings of the city of Anshan”.

Cyrus the Great as a city ruler

As we have seen, there is no indication beyond the evidence in the Babylonian record to the effect that any of Cyrus’ ancestors identified themselves as rulers of Anshan or that they actually ruled from the city of Anshan. Barring the latter possibility, the archaeological and written record⁷⁷ does not allow certainty, either, that the traditional Mesopotamian definition of kingship as the prerogative of cities could be fulfilled in a concrete manner by the circumstances of Persian settlement in Fars — unless one takes into account Cyrus’ royal capital at Pasargadae, the earliest known Persian “city” and a setting appropriate for royalty in terms of Mesopotamian standards. Following these leads to Cyrus’ time, one could suggest that, in the particular formulation of Cyrus’ title as “king of the city of Anshan” attested in the Cylinder, “Anshan” was an *alias* for Pasargadae,⁷⁸ whose beginning date of construction cannot be determined with precision but is currently estimated by David Stronach to some five years before Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon.⁷⁹

Be that as it may, the uncertainties which surround the testimony of the ancient record should not stand in the way of appreciating at least the abstract, ideological value of the dynastic association of Cyrus with the “city of Anshan” in a specifically Mesopotamian political context, and especially in a text whose various details aimed to promote an image of Cyrus as a legitimate Mesopotamian king.

Owing to the venerable place of Anshan in the political history of Fars and the Elamite world at large, Anshanite royal titulature might well have been a part of official representations of Cyrus’ royal authority in a western Iranian/Elamite environment before his conquest of Babylon. The special emphasis on Cyrus’ dynastic association with the “city” (rather than the “land”) of Anshan in the Cylinder might also be presupposed by the Middle Elamite royal title “king of Anshan and Susa”, which was revived in the Neo-Elamite period, and which, as

⁷⁶ Further reflections of the “presence” of the mentality of the King List in a Babylonian environment down to the era of Cyrus might be offered by the usual title, “king of Babylon”, of Neo-Babylonian rulers. According to Harmatta (1974: 36), this title —which sounds very modest by comparison to the expansive Assyrian royal titularies— would imply a Neo-Babylonian awareness that their kingdom (then “in the shadow”, as he states, “of the powerful Median empire”) could not aspire to grandeur. The seemingly modest title “king of Babylon” might have possessed, however, great prestige through an alignment with the age-old Mesopotamian perception of legitimate kingship as the prerogative of cities.

⁷⁷ See above, p. 7 and n. 44.

⁷⁸ Cf. the statement of Potts (1999: 311) that “Cyrus founded a new Anshanite capital at Pasargadae”. An ancient perception of Pasargadae as “the city of Anshan” could have emerged from a similar reasoning.

⁷⁹ Stronach 2008: 168.

Wouter Henkelman considers, “clearly refers to the two capital *cities*”.⁸⁰ The point is, however, that a characterization of Cyrus as a king of Anshan, and in particular of its capital city, would have been especially apt in the context of a representation of Cyrus as a “normative” Mesopotamian monarch. Anshan had been charted as a part of the wider Mesopotamian political realm from as early as the third millennium,⁸¹ and the important urban history of the city of Anshan certainly fulfilled the Mesopotamian “urban requirement” for legitimate rule. Whether or not the depiction of Cyrus and his forebears as “city rulers” agreed with historical realities, from the perspective of the Mesopotamian apologists of Cyrus’ accession to the Mesopotamian throne, an association of Cyrus’ line with the city of Anshan could be justified (just as it could be in a western Iranian/Elamite environment) by the undeniable fact of Persian settlement in the territory of this once prominent Elamite center.

Cyrus’ characterization as a “king of the city of Anshan” in the Cylinder would have linked the new, foreign lord of Babylon with the earliest strata of Mesopotamian political existence.⁸² Like the rest of the utterances of the Cylinder, it would have been aimed to summon local respect for Persian rule by enabling the “adoption” of Cyrus in the native Mesopotamian continuum of kingship.

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⁸⁰ Henkelman 2003a: 194.

⁸¹ See, among others, Hansman 1985b and Potts 1999: 85-129, with references.

⁸² Hansman (1985b: 104; cf. *idem* 1972: 101-102 and 1985a: 25-27) suggests as a possibility that “the country of Anshan, in part ... included the territories of Awan”. Awan (see Stolper 1987 and Potts 1999: 85-129), a place of much disputed geographical location in western Iran and a seat of power of late-third-millennium Elamite rulers, is included among the centers of kingship mentioned in the Sumerian King List (e.g., lines 145-59). If Hansman is correct in associating Anshan with Awan, the Anshanite dynastic title of Cyrus would have made an even more forceful statement of kinship between the Mesopotamian royal tradition and Cyrus’ royal authority.

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